

LT. HAROLD BROMLEY'S LOCKHEED SPECIAL

by

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In the late 1920's the great designer, John K. Northrop, laid out the first Lockheed "Sirius" monoplane, their first low-wing monoplane, and claimed to be their largest venture to date. (The Loughheed Bros. had made larger, if not heavier, biplanes at a much earlier date.) It was the first of the new concept of low-wing monoplanes of greatly streamlined shape, and was intended for Sir Hubert Wilkins, to be used on one of his exploration trips. Apparently his funds ran out before the plane could be completed and the partially finished fuselage was placed in storage for a time.

Lt. Harold Bromley, of Tacoma, Washington, bought the airplane for a trans-Pacific flight from Tacoma to Japan. This would be a hop of about 4,700 miles, and some changes were required to provide for this flight. As it turned out, there were ultimately two "Sirius" monoplanes made for Lt. Bromley, both named the "City of Tacoma", for his home city, both of which came to unhappy endings.

The first "City of Tacoma" was given number NR-856H and was tested on July 6, 1929. This is the cowled airplane with long triangular fin, not unlike the fin of the original "Vega I", shown in the upper photograph opposite. Inside the cowl was a Pratt & Whitney "Wasp" of 420 H.P., with a two-bladed propeller and small nose spinner. The span was 48 ft., 5 in. The gas tanks held about 890 gallons of fuel, enough for some 40 hours of flight, and Lt. Bromley calculated this should take him as much as 1,000 miles beyond Tokyo, his objective. A five-watt radio set of about 700 miles range was carried. A top speed of 185 miles per hour was expected. Various small modifications were made, including a mass-counterbalanced rudder at first (rounded off at top as seen in photo number 2, taken on the dry lake at Muroc), and change of tail skid to tail wheel.

The rudder was again changed, the new one having a nearly straight line along the top. Harold Bromley flew the "City of Tacoma" to Tacoma in July. During one of the take-offs there, Lt. Bromley lost control of the plane. With fuel spraying in his face (apparently surging through the vent pipes) he ground looped and the fuselage was badly damaged. Note the break in the arrow along the fuselage in the third photo. Also the wings gave the appearance of damage, so all instruments, hardware and engine were removed, and the remains of the plane were burnt on the spot on 21 July, 1929.

Immediately the "City of Tacoma" number 2 was built. This time a skid was built along the bottom of the fuselage and the landing gear was made droppable again. A counterbalanced (overhung) rudder was installed. Two full views of this plane are shown opposite. The cowling was not installed at the time as test flights were intended before installation. Part of the design and flight crew are shown in the left front view photo; none of these men have been identified.

The final picture of the "City of Tacoma" shows it upside down off the west end of the runway at Lockheed Air Terminal. The test pilot was Herb Fahy, who was making a low level pass for ground observers. The fin and rudder broke away and Fahy crashed and turned over, but he escaped with his life. No further effort was made to fly it.



The first "City of Tacoma"

W.M.Bodie



The modified "Tacoma" at Muroc Jos.H.Moore



Crash of "Tacoma I", 21 July 1929

Bodie



"Tacoma II", cowl off for flight test -Bodie



2nd "Tacoma" with flight crew Sept.'29 -Moore



Herb Fahy crash after rudder failure -Moore



A later "Sirius" variant

R.B.Jameson



Kingsford-Smith's "Lady Southern Cross"



1) Vultee XP-54      USAAF via G.H.Balzer



2) Curtiss XP-55      USAAF via Balzer



3) Northrop XP-56      Northrop via Balzer



4) Lockheed XP-58      Lockheed via W.M.Bodie



5) Northrop XP-61E      Northrop via Balzer



6) Gen'L Motors XP-75      USAAF via Bodie



7) Bell XP-77      USAAF via Balzer



8) Northrop XP-79B      Northrop via Balzer